THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HOME FOR CHILDREN: A STUDY

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Sociology 32
Professor Andrew Beales
April 28, 1965

acc. no. 1967

302.73
P391

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Congregational Home for Children is of major importance in the history of the Christian Church. It has a profound effect on young Christian children in need; it is a fostering of inadequate home life.

In order to compile a complete and accurate history of the institution, this study covers a period of approximately seventy years. This study also attempts to present an objective history of the Home's founding to the present day. Only those facts that are pertinent to this study have been related. Those facts which are related to the present prosperity and future plans have been obtained through numerous interviews with Doctor Snyder, the institution's Superintendent, and Mr. Bickerstaff, the Assistant Superintendent. Mrs. Oma Johnson, Librarian of Historical Society of the Southern Convention of the Congregational Christian Churches, must be mentioned for her gratifying memory in relating past facts.

This study is consequently very complete; it regards all related facts to be the history of the institution and perspective goals of the future.

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The Congregational Christian Home for Children, as the institution is named at the present time, began admitting children on January 28, 1907, when the past hopes of an earlier convention were finally realized. however, this date is not the date of its founding; one must search back to the first open discussions about the possible development of an Orphanage for Children. The study must begin of the founding at the Southern Christian Convention held in Burlington, North Carolina on June 6, 1896; for it was at this meeting that the Convention chose three people to lay the ground work for this dream. The committee was to find a good location as well as begin plans for an Orphanage Fund, which would develop into the core of the Orphanage support later. This Convention chose the three most capable men to do the job. They were Reverend W.S. Long, D.D., J.S. Mills, and E.L. Moffitt. They worked very hard and diligently to raise adequate funds, and on May 3, 1898, they reported that they had raised four hundred and ninety-eight dollars and thirty-eight cents. They were told to continue their splendid work and by the next meeting in 1900, they reported that they had expanded the fund greatly. On May 3, 1902, the Committee informed the Convention that they were ready to choose a site; thus, they were assigned to have chosen a site by the next bi-annual Convention to be held in Burlington. At this meeting, the committee was given

directions for the proper allocations of the funds already raised. All money was to be used towards the purchase of land.

The May 3, 1906 meeting of the Southern Christian Convention was possibly the most important meeting ever to be held up to that date concerning the Orphanage. At that meeting, the committee chose a site for the Orphanage; it was to be located in a small town called Elon College, which was already the site of a liberal arts college connected with the same denominational Protestant church. One hundred and twelve and a half acres were purchased for the purpose at hand. This particular location was chosen because of the availability of the land and its relative position to that of Burlington and Greensboro, North Carolina. This site seems to have been chosen after much thought, for the committee reported that

> after visiting many places that were suggested as suitable for the location of the Orphanage, and after consulting many friends of the enterprise, the trustees concluded December 27, 1904, to locate the Orphanage near Elon College.[1]

Now that land had been chosen and the necessary funds raised, it was time to choose the builders and types of buildings that would afford the most comfort to everyone involved. Brick, being fire-proof and rodent-resistant, was chosen. The building plans were adopted on April 19,

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[1] "The Orphanage", The Christian Annual, XXXVI (May 3, 1906), 43.

1905 and the trustees chose

> Kirkpatrick Bros. of Burlington, N.C., contracted to furnish brick, lime, etc., and complete the walls according to specifications drawn by the architects at a cost of $9.50 per thousand brick. Nicholson & Lashley, of Graham, N.C. contracted to furnish all material and do all woodwork, plaster, paint, etc., for the sum of $5,076.83. The plan of the building and specifications were drawn by Wheeler, Rugge & Dickey of Charlotte, N.C.[2]

The balance of the mortgage which had not already been collected was paid by loans and the generosity of personal donations. A charter was granted the Orphanage in 1905 by the North Carolina State Legislature. There were to be seven trustees in all. They were W.H. Carroll, L.M. Clymer, Dr. G.S. Watson, Elijah Moffett, Esq., Rev. J.O. Atkinson, D.D., C.D. West and Rev. I. W. Johnson. The first two for a period of six years, the next two for four years, and the remaining three for two years.

There were four sources of income for the Orphanage when it finally opened in 1907; the four were: Thanksgiving offerings given each year on a chosen Sunday, contributions made on behalf of Sunday schools, special children's offerings, and special donations. As it appeared then, these were the only sources that could be definitely counted on, and the special donations were thought only to be minor.

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[2] Ibid., p. 44.

During this time, the Orphanage was involved in the care of only orphans and half-orphans. There were no set standards for acceptance. The object of the Orphanage was "the support, training, and the proper care of indigent orphan children of the white race."[3]

Not until the May 1, 1914 meeting, was there any report of a permanent endowment fund; for at this meeting, it was announced that $3,102,85 had been left for the purpose of supporting the Orphanage. The benefactors were of the Mulholland estate, A. Savage estate, and J.A. Foster estate. These gifts indicate a recognition which hitherto had not existed. People not connected directly with the Orphanage were now making substantial donations.

The May 5, 1916 meeting brought about the election of new trustees. "The following were elected Trustees for the Orphanage: B.D. Jones to fill the place of J.E. Vincent, resigned, for four years; G.S. Watson and W.K.Q. Holt for six years."[4]

With the founding of more expenses in an age changed by war, a crash drive to raise money was being made in 1918. The Orphanage was forced to seek more financial aid than had been previously needed. All possible sources were requested to donate.

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[3]"The Committee on the Orphanage", The Christian Annual, XXXII (May 3, 1902), 13.

[4]"The Report of the Board of Trustees", The Christian Annual, XLV (May 5, 1916), 9.

> Every effort is being made to enlist every Sunday school in the Southern Christian Convention to make monthly contributions toward the support of the work and we are also making every effort possible to economize and combat with the high prices the very best we can.[5]

There was a constant effort to increase the financial capabilities of the Orphanage so that the children could be better supported. By May 4, 1922, the Board of Trustees, for the first time since its opening, were able to report that the Orphanage was out of debt and also had money in the bank. Prior to this date, the mortgages had not yet been paid on the buildings in full. For this institution it was a move toward financial stability.

> We are also glad to say to you that this institution has no debt but we have to our credit in cash, due bills and Liberty Bonds the amount of $4,355.26.[6]

It is interesting to note that during the time of hardship, the trustees always had faith in the future and this faith usually carried them on to the future.

During the early 1920's, the children of the Orphanage were stricken hard with various illnesses. Not until 1926, could they report that there had not been any illnesses in the year 1925. This was an indication of the progressive medical aid and a constant guiding eye for the children's welfare.

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[5]"The Report of the Board of Trustees of the Christian Orphanage", The Christian Annual, XLVII (May 4, 1918), 29.

[6]"The Report of the Board of Trustees of the Christian Orphanage", The Christian Annual, LI (May 4, 1922), 25 and 26.

The Orphanage had seen semi-prosperity, or rather, better times, when the Depression of 1929 hit North Carolina; for in that year, the storage barn burned down and all the crops in it were destroyed. However, it was insured and not much was lost. Although they were hit during that hard year of the Depression, the friends of the Orphanage supported it very amiably; yet, the road to survival was long and difficult.

On May 2, 1934, the Board of Trustees made a re-estimate of their accomplishments and they seemed to be quite pleased.

> During 27 years we have stuck to this one plan and have succeeded in financing the Orphanage, building a plant to care for the fatherless children, that is equal to any in North Carolina in its class.[8]

The plan that had been held for 27 years was that of faith; the supporters of the Orphanage and members of the church would not permit the institution to fail.

Still plagued by difficulties, there was another fire the following year.

> The year 1935 had its misfortunes as well as its blessings. In the month of January the building known as Boone House was destroyed by fire, but fortunately covered with insurance. The insurance money was used in buying four acres of land adjoining our campus and a very nice six-room cottage on it which is now occupied by the Orphanage farmer.[9]

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[8] "The Report of the Board of Trustees of the Christian Orphanage", The Christian Annual, LXIII (May 2, 1934), 19.

[9] "The Report of the Board of Trustees of the Christian Orphanage", The Christian Annual, LXV (April 29, 1936), 25.

Although 1936 was a poor year for the Orphanage because of the inability of the land to produce because of dryness, 1937 well made up for the previous dry season; for in that year, enough revenue was received to balance out the loss.

By 1940, the Orphanage was forced to rent the woods and pasture land because they were unable to farm this land. However, land was needed to farm on so that an annual revenue could be counted on; thus, an urgent plea for donations went out to the previous supporters. These funds were received because the Board of Trustees report on April 28, 1942 stated that the land had been obtained and the crops were rewarding. They reported that

> The Christian Orphanage now has three good brick buildings for children, and a farm of two hundred and fifty acres of good farming land on which it produces much of the stuff we use in the plant. It has a fine dairy head of cattle to furnish milk for the children.[10]

In 1946, for the first time in their history, the Orphanage received higher donations from outside church affiliated organizations than it did from the church. That same year they saw the prosperity of a good crop season, but that prosperity was followed by a very poor season of 1947; for in that year, the land was unable to produce because of a lack of water. Fortunately, they did not depend fully on these crops, as they had in 1937, and they could survive well enough to feed and care for the children.

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[10]"The Report of the Board of Trustees", The Christian Annual, LXXI (April 28, 1942), 13.

The years 1948-1955 were slow, uneventful years for the institution. Life was maintained and the Orphanage kept their ground in an attempt to keep above financial loss.

In 1956, the Board of Trustees realized that in the past they had been so busy trying to save the Orphanage from financial failure that they neglected the modern trend of an orphanage. They decided that capable people must now be hired, not just those interested in helping poor little orphans. They also suggested to change the institution from an "orphanage" to a "home". These suggestions by this Board brought about marked changes in the institution. On October 15, 1956, the name was changed to "The Congregational Christian Home for Children",[11] indicating a change from an orphanage type institution to a child care center. No longer were all children to be accepted in all numbers, but a specific number were to be accepted only when they passed the entrance requirements. The Home now tried to prepare the child and family to live together, or it tried to put the children some place where they would have been more appreciated; it was a broadening of the foster home program.

More care was placed upon the needs of both the child and the Home rather than the necessity of subsistence. Specialists in various fields were hired to work in conjunction with the Home and children.

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[11] "78978 Certificate of Amendment to the Charter of The Christian Orphanage", Section 1 (September 26, 1956).

By 1958, the Board of Trustees reported that

> ...the Home's program in its entirety is being revised and studied. The report of the Conventions Survey Committee of two years ago is being honored as your mandate to the institution.[12]

On the April 28, 1960 meeting, the Board of Trustees announced that in 1959, they had abandoned all farm operations because the operations had proved more of a liability than an asset.

By May 2, 1962, they had progressed so much towards the goals of the modern child care system that they were able to report that they had on their

> ...staff five housemothers, three food service managers, a seamstress, a maintenance and farm manager, secretary, part-time bookkeeper, assistant Superintendent, and a Superintendent. Also, we are fortunate this year to have a volunteer service worker from the Department of Specialized Ministries of the United Church on our staff. This is a very low number of employees compared to other institutions who care for approximately the same number of children as we do.[13]

At the present time, the children of the Home are now permitted to work in Burlington, North Carolina to earn their allowance. This allowance is used by the children for their own purposes; thus, employment is not mandatory for those who are old enough. The younger children who are unable to work are usually given some allowance for minor chores.

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[12] "The Report of the Board of Trustees of the Christian Orphanage", The Christian Annual, LXXXVII (May 1, 1958), 55.

[13] "The Report of the Board of Trustees of the Christian Orphanage", The Christian Annual, XMI (May 2, 1962), 46.

The children are being brought up in a good Christian atmosphere where they can get a sound Christian background for later life. Sunday and Wednesday services are held in Holt Memorial Chapel. Many activities are closely tied in with the Christian community around them. Although the institution is a Protestant institution, other faiths such as Catholicism and Judism are permitted to send children there. Segregation of race, nationality, or religion does not exist.

As a part of the modern conversion to an institution of high standing, a Foster Home program has been in effect ever since the Home was licensed by the Department of Public Welfare of North Carolina on July 1, 1962. This system is beneficial to both the Home and especially to the child. Under this new system, the children can possibly find a home that he could possibly call his own some day.

The parents are no longer separated from their children when the children are brought into the Home, they are asked to donate to the support of these children; the idea being that the parent would want to take an active responsibility towards the welfare of his child. However, this does not mean that all parents must contribute towards the support of the child. Some are unable to make these donations, yet they do definitely care for their children; these parents are asked only to take part in the group guidance sessions if the sessions are needed to bring the family together once again.

Children of the Home are permitted to date and participate in a maximum of school activities. There is an automobile at

their disposal, through the Home, should they want to date. Of course, only those with their drivers licenses are permitted to use this car. They attend local schools, and those who wish to progress in their formal education may attend Elon College (located at Elon College, North Carolina).

During the summer, the children of the Congregational Christian Home for Children may go swimming in the pool that is located on campus. The buildings are quite adequate.

This institution tries to see the future as a step in advancement of child care, the goal not being solely physical care, but psychological care as well.

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